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# The role of a school business manager : a reflective essay

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# The role of a school business manager : a reflective essay

## **Abstract**

The responsibilities of a school business manager are diverse, complex, dynamic, variable, and vast in scope. Although the role of an individual school business manager is determined and defined by local district policies and customs, the personal philosophies of the business manager, superintendent, and board of education have a tremendous impact on the actual responsibilities. Situations presented in this paper pertain to Iowa public K-12 schools. References made to federal actions, or other outside influences, are made only to gauge and assess the impacts on Iowa K-12 schools. The personal ideas and feelings expressed in this paper are the results of formal course study in preparation for this graduate program, interactions with other students at this level, twelve years of service on a local board of education, experience at a state board level, and participation in many educational conventions and conferences.

The Role of a School Business Manager:

A Reflective Essay

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

And Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Carl D. Benning

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for  
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The responsibilities of a school business manager are diverse, complex, dynamic, variable, and vast in scope. Although the role of an individual school business manager is determined and defined by local district policies and customs, the personal philosophies of the business manager, superintendent, and board of education have a tremendous impact on the actual responsibilities. Situations presented in this paper pertain to Iowa public K-12 schools. References made to federal actions, or other outside influences, are made only to gauge and assess the impacts on Iowa K-12 schools. The personal ideas and feelings expressed in this paper are the results of formal course study in preparation for this graduate program, interactions with other students at this level, twelve years of service on a local board of education, experience at a state board level, and participation in many educational conventions and conferences.

The importance of an effective school business manager has grown dramatically. Many societal and governmental changes have occurred since the first “acting manager” was hired in 1841 by the city council of Cleveland, Ohio, to “keep the books and care for the building” (Wood, 1986, p.14). The decline of the family farm shifted the population from rural to urban areas resulting in larger school districts with more complex educational programs, transportation needs, financing requirements, and administrative organizations. More attention became focused on local districts’ fiscal practices as increased state expenditures replaced

local taxes as a primary source of funds. In the 1960's, the federal government also began a massive infusion of capital that was accompanied by increased regulations regarding accountability of those funds. The increases in per-pupil spending, categorical and block grants, complex insurance issues, and a wider variety of funding options all contributed to the growing importance of the role of the school business manager (Wood, 1986). I believe the requirement for achievement accountability (Accountability for student achievement, 1998) will also increase the importance of this role.

Successful management of the wide array of responsibilities requires a school business manager to develop a broad base of expertise. A keen grasp of modern business practices, as well as a clear understanding of, and commitment to, the instructional program, is vital. Prudent management of human resources, effective coordination of fiscal and statistical data, sound management of business practices, and a knowledge of the legal and regulatory environment in changing times are all critical functions of an effective school business manager.

I believe the business manager is a key member of the team concept representing the administration and the local board of education in the management of district financial, physical, material, and human resources. Since the business manager's operations are affected by every educational decision, and any business decision affects the educational operations, it is imperative that a team management concept be maintained. Because the business of education is

usually one of the largest enterprises in the community, the inputs and ownership levels provided by the team concept, becomes even more important. The school business manager can be a more effective team player with a strong background in business functions as well as an understanding of the overall educational organization.

It should be understood that a business manager must possess intelligence, high ethical standards, integrity, good judgment, initiative, a creative vision, respect, a commitment to educational excellence, and a dedication to the mission of the local district. A school business manager must be an astute listener and an effective communicator. Strong verbal and written skills are valuable assets in relating effectively with superintendents, boards of education, administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students, and the community. I agree with Frederick Hill (1982) that a business manager must believe “in the fundamental dignity and worth of every human being” (p. 27). I believe three of the most important functions of a school business manager in Iowa’s K-12 districts at this turn of the century deal with personnel, business, and advocacy.

### Personnel Functions

#### Human Resource Management

More than any other single factor, the quality of human resources determines the success of the organization. Because only the large urban schools in Iowa have a separate administrative position of personnel director, in most schools the

business manager has a key role in the recruitment, selection, induction, and evaluation processes.

Recruitment can be defined as those activities designed to make available the numbers and quality of personnel needed to carry on the work of the school system. The short-range goal of filling a position is obvious, but the long-term plan must ensure a sufficient and continuous supply of qualified professional and support personnel. Internal factors which affect the recruitment process include: (a) enrollment projections, (b) budget, (c) positions available, (d) personnel requirements, (e) strategic plans, (f) personnel policies, (g) employment standards, and (h) personnel inventory. There are several external elements as well: (a) government regulations, (b) court decisions, (c) employment market conditions, (d) organization employment image, (e) birth and enrollment rates, and (f) other economic, social, political, and technical factors.

William Castetter (1986) outlines a very practical five-step approach to recruitment. The first step deals with the development of recruitment policy. Local policy must not discriminate with regards to race, color, religion, gender, or national origin, and must comply with equal employment opportunity regulations (Bowes, 1987). The issue of affirmative action, and its changing interpretations, (Long, 1996) must be addressed. Policies should also address position posting, fairness in promotions and transfers, seniority, credential requirements, skill inventories, position guides, probationary and outside employment, gifts and



favors, recruitment budget, candidate information, testing, and temporary employment. I believe it is the duty of the business manager to maintain an audit of personnel policies and procedures to ensure that they are not only followed, but are integrated with district goals and objectives.

The second step in the recruitment process is the development of recruitment activities. Advertising the vacancies and defining the stages of the process are critical; for example, a letter of application, initial screening, preliminary interview, further screening and verification, second interview, contract offer and acceptance, orientation, and induction.

The development of applicant sources is the next step in the recruitment process. Internal possibilities capable of advancing to better positions can be identified by the organization's personnel appraisal system. Position posting within the system is an excellent method, although some "capable" personnel may need encouragement to apply. External sources include the Des Moines Sunday Register, write-ins, walk-ins, placement bureaus, referrals, resumes on file, conventions and meetings, direct solicitations, advertisements in professional magazines and newsletters, and campus and field recruiting. The initial notice provided by the district should contain information about the position offered and brief school and community data. A letter of application should be requested which contains information about the candidate: reasons for desiring the position, employment history, and educational background.

The fourth step in the recruitment plan deals with the coordination of the applicant search. This stage involves monitoring the progress of candidates as each one moves through the various steps in the process. The school business manager, in my opinion, must control all recruitment correspondence, arrange all interview schedules, arrange visits, and maintain a file on each candidate.

Just as in any process, evaluation is the final step in the recruitment process. Several types of questions must be asked. What outcomes are we trying to achieve? Have our recruitment efforts been successful? How efficient and effective are the various sources we used? What is the quality of recruits we have employed? To what extent have recent recruits been promoted or terminated? How much time has elapsed between the initial contact and the contract signing?

The second major process involved with staffing has to do with selection. The primary aim is to fill existing vacancies with personnel who meet established qualifications, appear likely to succeed on the job, will be effective contributors to the district and building goals, and will be sufficiently motivated to achieve a high level of self-development. The selection process begins with the completion of the application form and continues with the development of measures to be used as performance or effectiveness predictors. Tests, interviews, reference checks, and preparation and experience requirements can all be used as predictors.

The preliminary interview should determine whether the applicant understands key requirements of the job, whether the applicant possesses minimal

qualifications, and to judge whether the applicant warrants further consideration. Other information that should result from the interview are the applicant's perceptions of the position, reasons for wanting the position, and views on the terms of employment. Research shows (Beach, 1989,) the team interview approach (where several persons interview a single candidate simultaneously) generally yields better results. The selection process can be enhanced by the use of intelligence, aptitude, interest, achievement, and personality tests. Care must be taken throughout the selection process that all legal issues are taken into consideration, and that all applications and interviews contain only bona fide occupational qualifications (Bowes, 1987).

The final step in the hiring process is the induction phase. Induction can be described as "a systematic organizational effort to assist personnel to adjust readily and effectively to new assignments" (Castetter, 1986, p. 186). Induction plan activities should include the review of the district's mission and goals, a review of the position's responsibilities, a building tour, and a community orientation. Other activities must deal with contractual details, handbooks, building level goals and objectives, and a complete building orientation with other staff.

The generation of applicant pools, the matching of individual talents with interests and opportunities, and the adjustment and orientation of personnel are the key ingredients of the recruitment, selection, and induction plans in the hiring

process. Although the school business manager may not be directly involved during each phase, I believe it is the business manager's responsibility to ensure the entire process flows smoothly in the proper legal framework.

Just as the role of a school business manager in the hiring process is primarily one of record keeping and as an advisor, so is the role of a business manager in the area of discipline and discharge of an employee.

Case law seems to support the following premises regarding First Amendment rights (U. S. Constitution, First Amendment). Teachers have a constitutional right to communicate their opinions to the public, so long as their words or actions do not disrupt or interfere with school programs (Pickering v. Board of Education, 1968). In 1974, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with a high school teacher that he could speak openly against the presence of military recruiters in the school (Birdwell v. Hazelwood School District, 1978). Academic freedom in the use of certain materials generally protects the teacher unless the materials are proven to be inappropriate for the age and emotional maturity of the students (Brubaker v. Board of Education, 1975). In another case (Parduci v. Rutland, 1970), an eleventh-grade English teacher was dismissed by the board for assigning materials that were against the advice of the principal. The court found the materials were appropriate for high school students and that the school board failed to carry the burden of proof that the materials were inappropriate. Private conduct of a teacher that does not impair a teacher's fitness to teach cannot be

grounds for dismissal, even if the activity is disapproved of by the community (Stoddard v. School District, 1979). In this case, the federal court entered judgment for the teacher when evidence revealed the real reasons for her dismissal were rumors that she was having an affair with another resident of the trailer park where she lived, she played cards, and she did not attend church regularly. On the other hand, a teacher's dismissal was upheld when she refused to teach patriotic materials that a school board reasonably could require (Palmer v. Board of Education, 1980).

Termination of an employee may involve both federal and state due process procedures (U. S. Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment; Code of Iowa, Chapter 279). The U. S. Supreme Court has determined that a claimed right or benefit may constitute "property" (Board of Education v. Roth, 1972). The Iowa Supreme Court has determined teachers (Code of Iowa, Section 279.13-15) and administrators (Code of Iowa, Section 279.24) have contractual rights and thus have a constitutionally protected property interest in continual employment (Fairfield Comm. School District v. Justman, 1991). The Eighth Circuit Court (Winegar v. Des Moines Ind. Comm. School District, 1994) held that the district violated the plaintiff's due process rights by not providing the teacher a full hearing before the district's board of directors.

Although there is great variation in the application of legal standards from one jurisdiction to another, the school business manager plays a crucial role in all four

elements of public school employment management: employment qualifications, contractual obligations, tenure, and discipline (Beckham, 1983).

### Collective Bargaining Management

There are obvious differences in the ultimate goals that are pursued by the public employee organization and the public employer. While the employees are most concerned with compensation and benefits, authority, and job security, the school district administrative team and the board are most concerned with obtaining the highest educational achievement levels possible in the most efficient manner. I believe the school business manager must be familiar with the legal framework (Code of Iowa, Chapter 20) to be an effective member of the management team in the collective bargaining process.

Several legal considerations have arisen since Iowa's first collective bargaining requirement in 1975. Many of the legal questions deal with the scope of bargaining (Code of Iowa, Sec. 20.9). The number of teaching periods per day, the amount of pupil contact time, the maximum number of students, and the restrictions on work assignments are permissive subjects of bargaining (Public Employee Relations Board [PERB] Nos. 598 and 602, 1976, Bettendorf-Dubuque Community School Districts). However, special assignment proposals in addition to the regular workday are mandatory subjects (PERB No. 1173, 1978, Marion Ind. School District). An employer's only obligation to negotiate the selection or the change of an insurance carrier is to the extent that the choice of carrier affects

the benefits, coverages, and the administration of the program (PERB No. 1600, 1980, Sioux City Community School District). PERB ruled that proposals calling for cash payments additional to wages made directly to the employee are mandatory subjects (PERB No. 1918, 1981, Tri-Center Community School District), while the proposal for mileage reimbursements for the use of an automobile is a permissive subject (PERB No. 2629, 1984, Andrew School District).

A second area of many legal contentions deals with evaluation and evaluation procedure. An Iowa District Court has ruled that evaluation procedures are mandatory subjects, the evaluation procedures must include substantive criteria, and the evaluations can be grievable (Aplington Community School District v. PERB, 1986). In another case, this same court ruled that a custodian's termination was a form of "evaluation" and thus, was subject to grievance (Postville Community School District v. Billmeyer, 1996). Limitations on who may perform teacher evaluations and remediation are both permissive subjects (PERB No. 2402, 1983, Eddyville Community School District). An evaluation instrument proposal is a permissive subject (PERB Nos. 598 and 602, 1976, Bettendorf-Dubuque Community School District). PERB has ruled that evaluation proposals relating to performance outside the classroom and the procedures to be utilized can be mandatory subjects (PERB No. 2138, 1982, Coon Rapids Community School District).

While management needs to protect its rights in the negotiation process, it is best to develop a system of assessment that has the support of the teacher's association. Even though the school business manager will not be directly involved in the evaluation process, I believe the manager's attitude toward, and treatment of, employees on a day-to-day basis, will impact the process. Ron Peeler sums evaluations up like this: the evaluation "procedures should not be difficult to administer, but should also assure that performance is adequately monitored" (presentation to Iowa Association of School Boards [IASB] Employment Relations Conference, September, 1996).

As a member of the management bargaining team, I believe the school business manager must also be aware of the "good faith" clause (Code of Iowa, Sec. 20.10). Typical actions which violate this section involve: (a) intentional misrepresentations, (b) evasive tactics or delays, (c) failure to make counter-proposals, (d) imposing conditions, (e) unreasonableness and insufficiency of proposals, and (f) rejections of proposals. PERB has ruled that a school district, knowing that its employee insurance costs would decline because of a future change, and yet maintaining all through bargaining that its insurance costs would increase substantially, did violate this section (PERB No. 3764, 1990, Charles City Community School District). PERB ruled (PERB No. 1107, 1977, Burlington Community School District) that the employer could not condition its participation in bargaining upon the union's failure to agree to conduct all



negotiations in public. A school was also found in violation when it failed to offer a sufficient initial bargaining position (PERB No. 2458, 1983, Davenport Community School District). Iowa City Community School District (PERB No. 3395, 1987) was found in violation because it refused to discuss evaluation criteria and procedures during bargaining, when the employer: (a) knew its position was unacceptable to the union, (b) acknowledged the need for changes, and (c) failed to discuss a revised procedure recommended by its own evaluation committee. The range of bargaining behaviors is virtually limitless, and an agency or court will consider whatever relevant behavior has occurred to determine whether a prohibited/unfair labor practice has taken place (Berry, presentation to IASB Employee Relations Conference, September, 1996).

Since the salary and fringe benefits commit an estimated 70-75% of the district's total operating budget, the chief responsibility of the school business manager, in my opinion, is to develop financial strategies within this legal framework to enable the district to remain solvent. The business manager must gather all the financial data and cost out each of the salary and fringe benefit components involved in the process. The manager should strongly discourage the negotiating team from tentatively agreeing to any single economic condition without agreement on all economic issues. Research of the trends in compensation, a study of the comparabilities of similar districts, and an analysis

of the district's financial condition are all responsibilities of the school business manager (Wood, 1986).

The business manager must also be familiar with the impasse procedures (Code of Iowa, Sec. 20.19-20.22). As the negotiations process moves to mediation and beyond to arbitration, the manager must be concerned with: (a) the exact points of disagreement and final offers from each side on each issue; (b) the clearly demonstrated need, the history of concessions made by each party, and the level of support for each item; (c) the evidence to support the district's position (comparabilities of salaries, benefits, pupil/teacher ratios, state and federal aid, tax burdens, projected revenues and expenditures, etc.); and (d) the compilation of information on the current status and proposed offerings of each unresolved issue.

I think the role of the school business manager in the collective bargaining process has expanded to include the incorporation of employees' needs, the facilitation of the education of the local board in understanding the process, and the determination to meet the district's goals and objectives.

### Operations Management

An understanding of employee motivation and worker satisfaction will assist the school business manager in providing a work climate conducive to optimum performance. While the business office employees are under direct responsibility of the business manager, all other district employees are, to some extent, under the manager's realm of influence.

A leadership model known as the “expectancy theory” (Strauss, & Sayles, 1980, pp. 83-84) has direct relevance for the school business manager. This theory says it is the task of the manager to provide a system where employees can expect that greater effort will lead to rewards. This theory also forms the basis for many personal development plans for which the business manager is usually responsible. Ben Harris (1980) gives an excellent definition of staff development: “any planned program of learning opportunities afforded staff members...for the purpose of improving the performance of an individual in already assigned positions” (p.21).

I believe the business manager’s role can be similar to the role of a facilitator, whom Herrick (1990) describes as a person “responsible for moving the group through the problem-solving process” (p. 264). It is important for the school business manager to understand effective personnel practices since many elements are identified as having a direct impact on the business function: compensation, insurance, safety, retirement programs, labor relations, pension planning, protection and security, food services, and student transportation (Wood, 1986). The impact of such functions is so direct in terms of expenditures that many districts designate these as specific functions of the school business manager.

### Business Functions

Unlike many aspects of personnel functions, where the business manager may have only indirect responsibilities, I believe the school business manager has total responsibility for all business functions in the district. These functions include the management of cash, investment, risk, supply, payroll, records, budget development, and auditing.

Cash management can be simply defined as the process of managing monies of a district to ensure maximum cash availability and yet pay all expenditures in a timely manner. A cash budget must be developed to estimate the anticipated revenues and disbursements; plans must be developed for investing short-term surpluses and making up short-term deficits. Policies must be developed and procedures established for internal control mechanisms, the frequency and types of reports, and an evaluation of the effective use of cash management.

Proper cash management should lead to the necessity of investment management. Again, policies must be developed for the various types of investments, the criteria for selection of financial institutions, and the responsibility for each. The financial goals for the school business manager to consider, for any type of investment, are safety, liquidity, and yield. The safety issue of any investment should be the top priority. The liquidity or availability issue will be determined by the cash flow budget. The yield issue should determine the investment that will yield the highest percentage return for the time

period involved. If the cash flow budget indicates there may be short-term deficits, there must be provisions made to cover cash needs for these periods. The school business manager must be familiar with the Iowa School Cash Anticipation Program (ISCAP). This is a complex pooling program sponsored by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) whereby short-term funds can be borrowed at little or no interest.

The school business manager, in my opinion, must deal with four fundamentals of risk management: risk identification and measurement, risk reduction and elimination, risk transfer, and risk assumption. Risk identification has to do with the probability of a particular happening while risk measurement assesses the frequency and severity.

Only under very rare circumstances will the school business manager be able to eliminate risks completely; therefore, the manager's real task becomes one of educating others about risk reduction. Some examples of risk reduction programs include the establishment of: (a) necessary checks and balances for all money transactions, (b) a loss identification program, (c) wellness programs, (d) safety inspections, (e) pre-employment physical exams, (f) safety training programs, (g) an adequate inventory procedure, and (h) a procedure for post-incident claims control.

Risk transfer will shift the risk to others contractually, or, as a last resort, to an insurance provider. Risk assumption deals with the district's decision to retain all

risk. It may be more cost effective to retain the risk when the frequency is high and the severity is low, (e.g., glass breakage). The acceptance of deductibles is another form of risk assumption. Some risks can be forced upon the district when there is no insurance market available or the cost is prohibitive. Randal (1986) summarizes, as insurance premiums increase and coverages become more complex, the school business manager must be aware of the functions and practices which make up risk management.

Supply management can be defined as those activities that relate to timely obtaining materials, supplies, and equipment that are required to operate schools and serve educational programs. An orderly procedure involving requisitions, purchase orders, actual orders, reception of goods, and payment must be developed. I think the school business manager is ultimately responsible for: (a) determining how much and when supplies are needed, (b) synchronizing time needed for delivery, (c) providing quality within a budget, (d) storing goods without tying up dollars in excess inventory, (e) keeping unsuccessful bidders happy, and (f) satisfying school personnel when specific brands are not purchased or deliveries are late. As school district budgets are constantly pressured, the need for effective supply management increases in order for the district to achieve its instructional program goals.

The business manager should attempt to keep the auditing and reporting functions simple and easy to comprehend. As the board of directors and the

public better understand the financial picture of the district, the support for the district's goals will generally increase. Because an unqualified annual audit is very expensive and time-consuming, a qualified annual audit will usually be adequate. The school business manager must ensure that all financial reporting systems display the financial situation in simplest terms and should include all revenues, expenditures, cash position, investments, payables, and any unique occurrences. "Board members expect clear, cogent oral presentations from their business officials and expect them to know the answers to financial questions" (Graczyk, 1997, p. 21).

I believe budget development must be a function of the entire administrative team, of which the business manager is a key player. Factors affecting the budget system development are the: (a) method of budgeting (i.e., program, function, site-based, zero-based, etc.), (b) level of participation, (c) degree of decentralization, (d) timeline, (e) level of detail, and (f) degree of technology usage.

An understanding of the various types of budget development is necessary to clarify the role of the business manager in each. The most traditional is the function (e.g., instruction) or the object (e.g., salaries) type of budgeting. These types contribute to the perpetuation of the status quo, the incremental nature of budgeting, and the tendency to bargain for a "fair share." These methods are also the most centralized, require the least time to develop, and result in little or no

consensus on priorities. With the proper software, the process is very simple for the business manager to add (or subtract) the proposed increments to each segment of the budget.

Program budgeting allocates expenditures by program (e.g., art, science, math, etc.). This method promotes decentralization by increasing participation if teachers and principals are involved. It also gives rise to greater accountability and causes the administration to re-evaluate past practices. The difficulty to coordinate between schools and the possible increase in “turf squirmishes” are disadvantages of program budgeting. This method may be particularly beneficial during expenditure cuts, because it requires the development of priorities for all particular programs. The school business manager must be able to adequately cost out each program for this method to be successful.

A zero-based budget requires all expenditures to be justified from zero; program options are identified and the most cost-effective option is chosen. This method is very time consuming, makes it difficult to coordinate district goals, and there can easily be a problem of equity. It increases input and understanding, encourages decisions based upon program priorities, and may help sell a budget to the board and the community. This method is best used for non-essential programs and requires the business manager to develop more background financial data. One variance of zero-based budgeting is when the new budget



expenditures are based at some percentage of the former budget; that is, individual items are justified from eighty percent rather than starting at zero.

The trend is toward site-based budget development, where an individual building determines its own educational program needs as a framework and places the principal at the center of the budgeting process. This method increases the level of participation, promotes accountability, and most nearly meets the need of unique student groups in that building. Site-based budgeting may increase the conflict between teachers and departments, may inhibit the district's ability to ensure quality and equality, and may make it more difficult to achieve district goals and objectives. There are many variations of this type; for example, salary, utility, and transportation expenditures can be factored out of site-based decision making. The monies have "to be aligned with the responsibility for results or accountability goes out the window" (Strembitsky, 1997, p 4). Site-based budgets not only require the business manager to juggle a lot of variables, the district also needs to establish strategic priorities for the allocation of funds. I believe the advantages of site-based budgeting (e.g., increased participation, accountability, and meeting students' needs most closely) offset the increased requirements of the district to maintain quality, ensure equality, and achieve district goals.

I believe it is essential for the school business manager to become familiar with the various revenue sources and the types of taxes that make up those

sources (Sergiovanni, et. al., 1992). The qualities of a good tax system, the total assessed valuation in the district, the general levels of income of the patrons in the district, the current mix of revenue sources in the district, and potential new sources of revenues are critical factors a business manager should know (Burrup, Brimley, & Garfield, 1988). Being able to explain the overall picture, and any potential changes, to the board of directors and the community will enhance the feasibility of pursuing new funding avenues; for example, physical plant and equipment levy, instructional support levy, and bond issues.

### Advocacy Functions

#### Awareness Effort

I strongly believe the school business manager has the responsibility to advocate for public K-12 children. This is a role that can be time consuming and frustrating, but also very rewarding and beneficial. The first step in this advocacy function is to make the effort to become aware of happenings that have a potential impact upon educational programs.

The business manager should become familiar with a long list of issues that affect K-12 education. Several personnel and collective bargaining issues have already been discussed. Funding issues include allowable growth, budget guarantee, special education funding, technology funding, instructional support funding, early childhood programs, supplemental weighting, transportation aid, local option sales tax, post-secondary enrollment, and fee waiver funding. Other

issues, some of which may impact funding, are tax increment financing regulations, changes in budget certification and bargaining dates, the development of a new finance formula, tuition tax credits, vouchers, sexual exploitation of minors, drug testing of students, joint bond issues, student records, and Iowa Public Employee Retirement System (IPERS) changes.

There are many court decisions that can impact a school business manager's responsibilities. Some recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings will impact most Iowa schools. In Agostini v. Felton (Russo, 1997), the Court ruled five-to-four that Title I services could be provided on-site for students in non-public schools. This will free up dollars for instruction that had previously been used for transportation to, or rental of, a neutral site. In Frey v. Cedar Rapids Community School District, the Court ruled seven-to-two that the school district is responsible for costly medical services for a quadriplegic (Supreme Court: Schools must serve medical needs, 1999).

Specific legislative proposals, both federal and state, must also be tracked by the school business manager. I believe it is essential for the business manager to establish a relationship with legislative representatives so they will respect the manager's expertise on educational issues. All federal and state representatives have their own e-mail addresses and correspondence opportunities. The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBOI) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) both publish monthly magazines and NSBA

publishes a bi-weekly newsletter covering federal issues. When the Iowa General Assembly is in session, legislative activity dealing with educational issues can be followed on the IASB website ([www.ia-sb.org](http://www.ia-sb.org)). Also, the Speaker of the House has a weekly e-mail service entitled Edu-MAIL available through

[dfoglem@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:dfoglem@legis.state.ia.us).

### Advocacy Effort

The school business manager must follow the effort to maintain awareness by an effort for advocacy. I believe this process must be centered on those efforts that will lead to increased student achievement levels. Phone calls, letters, e-mail, and legislative representative visits are possible avenues for furthering one's agenda.

Working within various professional organizations can increase an individual's advocacy efforts. By convincing a couple of board members and a few administrators in the local district, and getting them involved in their respective professional organizations, the business manager can soon multiply all advocacy efforts.

Finally, I believe all business managers must be advocates for their profession. They must support the actions of colleagues whenever possible and should never publicly criticize any other administrator. They must also offer assistance and/or guidance to colleagues, actively support appropriate professional organizations, and accept responsibilities when appropriate. However, the business manager

must not be guilty of a “blind” allegiance; “Decisions should be made on the basis of professional judgment and in a way that allows for democratic participation of important stakeholders” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 107). Along with the rest of the administrative team, I believe the school business manager must assume the responsibility for the purpose of providing educational opportunities to all. Since one’s actions will be viewed and appraised by the community, professional associations, and students, it is imperative the business manager maintain high standards of exemplary professional conduct.

The basic functions of a school business manager can be summarized as those skills pertaining to planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, decision-making, and evaluating. The manager’s responsibilities are indeed, diverse, complex, dynamic, variable, and vast in scope. In my opinion, an effective business manager, as an administrative team player, will facilitate efficient operations in the local district so that maximum financial and personnel resources may be invested in educational programs that will lead to increased student achievement.

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